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## **The Parent-Child Relation in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner***

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### **Abstract**

This paper will seek to analyse the parent-child relation as presented in the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. Khaled Hosseini is an Afghanistan born and America resident author. Parent-child relation is an important concern in world literature. It is one of the prime concerns in the novel. All the important characters in the novel have different relation with their parents. Even the relation of a child varies, from that with father and the mother. The parent-child relations keep on evolving in the novel. The paper will look into the longing for love, conflict and warmth which are an important aspect of parent-child relation in the novel. All the characters, major as well as minor have conflicting as well loving relation with one of the parent. The protagonist Amir himself has longing for his father's love. The parent-child relation has been asserted symbolically also. The novel is a realistic portrayal of the parent-child relation, with both its sorrows and happiness.

**Keywords**

Parent-child; Longing; Love; Hatred; Differences.

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The Parent-child relation plays an important role in human life. “Man is a social animal”, rightly observed Aristotle, but the first step towards society starts with a child’s bond with his parents. Among the various relations a person develops throughout his life, the fundamental one is that of a Parent-child. A parent’s relation with his child relation has great impact upon a child’s life. A warm and loving relation ensures a happy life. It has an indelible effect in a child’s personality development. Similarly a distorted and strained relation of a child with his parent hinders the child’s effectual development of personality.

The Parent- child relation is one of the important topics of academic discussion and research. It also holds a pleasure place in the World literatures. From *King Lear* to Freud’s Oedipus complex, D.H Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* to *Go Tell it on the Mountain* by James Baldwin, parent-child relation has been an important thematic concern.

Khaled Hosseini’s debut novel, *The Kite Runner*, was published in 2003. Khaled Hosseini is an Afghanistan born American writer, who originally is a doctor. He pursued his love of writing with his medical profession and wrote his first and wildly acclaimed novel *The Kite Runner*. His other works are *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013). The novel set in Afghanistan, is a story of two friends Amir and Hassan, however their relation changes when Amir fails to take stand when Hassan has been raped by a gang of boys. Amir and Baba move to America until Amir comes back after twenty six years to rescue Sohrab, Hassan’s son. Love, betrayal, past guilt though are the main themes of the novel, the parent-child relation is also an important thematic concern of the novelist, as Hosseini in an interview says in relation to his two novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

“Both the novels are multigenerational, and so the relationship between parent and child, with all of its manifest complexities and contradictions, is a prominent theme”. The novel is a realistic analysis of parent-child relationship.

The relation of Amir, the protagonist of the novel and his father is highlight of the novel. Amir and Baba do not share very harmonious relation while they are living in Afghanistan. Amir used to think that his father hated him, as he was the cause of his mother’s death. While in Afghanistan Amir throughout his childhood longs for his father’s affection. As Amir as a child says “He’d close the door, leave me to wonder why it was always grown- ups’ time with him (Baba). I’d sit by the door, knees drawn to chest. Sometimes I sat for an hour, sometimes two, listening to their laughter, their chatter” (Hosseini 5). His father was mostly busy with his work .He would always long for Baba’s affection and then when he used to get some time with him , he wanted to spend it solely with him. He even didn’t want Hassan by his side at that time. It is his longing for Baba’s love that made Amir envious of Hassan. He hated his father treating Hassan, a servant’s child and himself as equals.

Baba also is not satisfied with Amir and says “If I hadn’t seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I’d never believe he’s my son” (Hosseini 22). Baba finds Amir quite opposite to himself. He wants Amir to be like himself, who would stand for what is right and wrong. He thinks of Amir as one who cannot take a stand. In the beginning, Baba is not very supportive of Amir’s passion for story writing. It is quite visible from Baba’s interaction with Rahim Khan that he would have felt good if Amir was more interested in sports like himself and not in books. He is aware of the gulf between them, and feels grateful that Rahim Khan understands Amir because he himself doesn’t. Amir who most of the time longed for his father’s affection, at times also hated him in his childhood innocence, for Baba’s lack of interest in him, “Most days I worshipped Baba with an intensity approaching the religious. But right then, I wished I could open my veins and drain his cursed blood from my body”

(Hosseini 30). Amir's strong desire for his father's love has a very destructive effect on him. He often thinks that all the fathers hated their sons. Amir thinks of gaining his father's love by winning the kite flying competition and by catching the last kite. His silence at the time when Hassan was being raped was due to fear and partly due to his desire of making Baba proud by getting the last kite. An elder and more mature Amir, later in his life, is aware of the sin he committed to gain his father's love.

However later when Amir and Baba move out to America, during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, their relationship is tender and harmonious as compared to that in Afghanistan. Baba shows his love for Amir when he graduates from the high school. Amir feels elated at his graduation day, when Baba says that he is proud of him. Amir no longer craves for his father's love and makes an independent choice of his career in writing instead of medical and law as his father desired. He says "I would stand my ground, I decided. I didn't want to sacrifice for Baba anymore. The last time I had done that, I had damned myself" (Hosseini 125). Their relationship goes to a further level in America. Later in the novel when Amir comes to know about the whole secret of Hassan's parentage, he analyses his past relationship with Baba on terms of guilt:

I had been the entitled half, the society-approved, legitimate half, the unwitting embodiment of Baba's guilt. I looked at Hassan, showing those two missing front teeth, sunlight slanting on his face. Baba's other half. The unentitled, unprivileged half. The half who had inherited what had been pure and noble in Baba. The half that, maybe, in the most secret recesses of his heart, Baba had thought of as his true son (Hosseini 329).

Amir in the later stage of the novel thinks Baba as a thief, who stole from Amir his identity and from Ali his honour. Amir and Baba's relation seems to be improving while they stay in America. They begin to accept each other. Baba

is like an ideal loving father. He is understanding towards Amir's love for Soraya and even arranges his marriage with her. He does his utmost to hide his disease from Amir. But even then he tries to make Amir self-dependent, who won't need his support in his life. But at the end of the novel, Amir reflects about his father and his dilemma. He finds Baba and Rahim Khan guilty, as they held back such a great secret of Hassan's real father from Ali, Hassan and himself. Some critics analyse Amir and Baba's relation in terms of power. According to Mark Graham, Baba represents the goal of masculine power, which Amir longs to have (151).

The other parent-child relation that is a highlight of the novel is that of Ali and Hassan. Ali and Hassan share a harmonious relation with each other. We get glimpse of their cordial relation through several episodes in the novel. When Hassan has been molested by Assef and his gang, during the kite flying competition, Ali notices the change in Hassan's behaviour and gets worried about him, and asks Amir the reason for it. The understanding between father and son is so good that Hassan confounds the secret of his rape by Assef only to his father. Ali stands by his child Hassan when the latter is accused of theft by Amir. Ali detests Amir and wants to protect Hassan. He politely asks leave of 'Agha sahib' and leaves with Hassan to their village. Ali is portrayed as a supportive father. Though they do not have wealth they always have each other by their side.

The bond that Soraya and General Tahiri share is also another facet of parent - child relationship in the novel. Soraya and her father do not share a warm relation. There are differences between them, of which both of them are aware. The coldness in their relationship is visible in their interactions. It is only later in the novel that we learn the reason for the strained relation between General Tahiri and Soraya, as we get to know from what Soraya tells Amir before their wedding. The reason was Soraya's absconding with an Afghan boy. The cruel treatment meted out to Soraya by General, who made Soraya

cut off all her hair leaves a bitter taste in our mouth. This is General's punishment for Soraya's absconding. Soraya is conscious of the wrong she did by running away, and of the manner in which she spoke to her father. But still they have differences. General who is a staunch patriarch collides with Soraya's spirit. Soraya who is a modern girl finds her father's dominant attitude appalling. The clash between them is a clash between dominance and defiance. Their choices are also different Soraya who wants to follow her childhood dream wants to become a teacher, while her father wants her to go to a law school. Though conscious of General's choice, she is still resolute to become a teacher and says to Amir "My father wants me to go to law school, my mother's always throwing hints about medical school, but I am going to be a teacher. Doesn't pay much here, but it's what I want" (Hosseini 140). The firmness of tone in the Soraya's speech is an ample proof of Soraya's headstrongness. And this is the reason for the clash between the daughter and father. Though Soraya is suppressed by General's dominance but later she breaks off from his control after her marriage to Amir. After marriage there are found several instances of argument between them. Even General accepts Amir's marriage proposal considering Amir and his Baba's family history, and not because of Soraya's love interest. Soraya who wants to follow her own path feels entrapped with the limitations imposed by General Taheri. There's a slight hint that Soraya and her father's relation seems to improve at the end of the novel.

In the later part of the novel another parent child relation has been introduced, that of Hassan and Sohrab. Theirs is a bond above all the parent-child relation in the novel. Hassan and Sohrab's relation is an ideal parent-child relation in the novel. They used to play and catch kites with each other. Hassan doesn't want his son to grow up illiterate like him. The warmth of their relation is clearly visible in the following lines "Hassan would prop Sohrab on his shoulders and they would go trotting through the streets, running kites,

climbing trees where kites had dropped” (Hosseini 197). Hassan is always worried about Sohrab’s future. After Hassan and his wife’s death, Sohrab misses his parents and especially his father. There are hints that Sohrab was more attached to his father than his mother. Sohrab is worried as he says to Amir that he is beginning to forget the faces of his parents. He longs for his father.

A different aspect of parent- child relation in the novel is that the children have a warm and cordial bond with their mothers. Most of the mothers are absent figures in the novel. Amir longs for the love of his mother, Sofia Akrami. He wants to know his mother, as he has no memory of her. He feels guilty of his mother’s death in childbirth. When he returns to war torn Afghanistan and meets a man who knew his mother he is inquisitive for some information that the man can supply, about his mother. He is even ready to risk his life and come again to the same spot if the same person could tell him something more of her.

Amir’s separation from his mother was involuntarily because of death, while Hassan’s mother Sanaubar deserted him at his birth. Sanaubar had left Ali and Hassan just after five days of Hassan’s birth. She was not satisfied with her marriage with Ali. She disliked Ali and the same dislike got transferred to Hassan at his birth. Disgusted enough of Ali’s limping, Sanaubar was appalled by Hassan’s cleft lip at his birth, and ran away with the band of singers and dancers. Initially she disliked Hassan so much that she even refused to look at Hassan’s face. Hassan never talked about his mother when he was a child. Children used to taunt him about his runaway mother. Sanaubar returns to Hassan filled with guilt and regret after absence of almost twenty years. She is aware of the wrong she did to Hassan. She now longs for her son Hassan’s love. When she comes back to Hassan, she is broken in spirit and form and is hardly discernible. An angered Hassan refuses to see her. But later he submits to the motherly love. He takes great care of her and restores her health. He

starts anew with his mother. They now share a bond of affection. Rahim Khan the witness of the loving bond states their warmth as if “They were catching up on all the lost years, I suppose” (Hosseini 195). Hassan and his family live joyfully with each other. When Sohrab is born, Sanaubar’s happiness knows no bound. They together raise Sohrab. After Sanubar’s death Hassan is deeply grieved at the loss of his mother as “it always hurts more to have and lose than to not have in the first place” (Hosseini 196).

The relation of Soraya is also cordial with her mother Khanum Taheri. Her mother understands her and is also supportive of her. The latter is deeply worried about the marriage of her daughter. She suffers from a paralysis stroke when Soraya ran away with an Afghan boy. Soraya feels guilty for what her mother had to suffer because of her. Khanum Taheri , even tries to bridge the gap between father and daughter, for instance she tries to make Soraya understand the reason behind the General’s choice of law as career for Soraya. Khanum Taheri is a loving person, and a perfect epitome of motherly love. Soraya on her part understands the grieved heart of her mother because of the cruelty on the part of her father, General Taheri. She feels angry when her father ill-treats her mother. Even Amir also feels the warmth of the mother and daughter’s affection, during the short meetings with Soraya in the flea market. He realises that Khanum Taheri approves of Soraya and his love. She accepts Amir gladly, while General is always worried about what society will think of them. The cordiality between them is due to their mutual understanding and love for each other.

As the novel unfolds, we see an evolution in the parent- child relations. Hosseini says in an interview “I did not intend this but I am keenly interested, it appears, in the way parents and children love, disappoint, and in the end honor each other”. The relation among the children and parents keep changing with time. Amir’s bond with Baba improves in America, they seem to have come to terms with each other. Hassan who also hated his mother years ago, later



comes to establish cordiality with her. Soraya's bond also improves with her father.

The concern of the novelist for parent-child relation runs even in between the lines of the text. It is asserted symbolically also. The allusion to *Shahnamah*, a tenth century epic by Persian poet Ferdowsi, also brings forward the longing for love in parent child relation. Amir used to read this book to Hassan during their childhood. It was their favourite book, and their favourite story in the book was that of "Rostam and Sohrab". Rostam, a Persian hero who while being a guest in Samangan Kingdom, has a child with princess Tahmina. He leaves the kingdom and doesn't meet Tahmina ever. Tahmina names the child Sohrab, who becomes a great warrior. After many years, Sohrab and Rostam meet in the battle field, both unknown of each other's identity. During the fight, Rostam mortally wounds Sohrab, however before Sohrab dies he comes to know the truth through the bracelet he gave to Tahmina for their son ("Tragedy of Sohrab"). Sohrab whose longing, for his father's love, brings him to the battle field ends with his tragic death. Rostam is grief stricken for killing his own son. Sohrab's longing for his father's love finds an echo in Amir's sentiments in his longing for Baba's love "personally I couldn't see the tragedy in Rostam's fate. After all didn't all fathers in their secret hearts harbour a desire to kill their sons?"(Hosseini 28). The story of "Rostam and Sohrab" serves as a symbol to highlight the parent- child relation in the novel. It is also used as a motif to further assert Amir's sentiments towards his father.

Another motif that serves the theme of parent- child relation is the Taliban occupation of Afghanistan. There are rattling of guns and among them there are cries of orphan children. The violence in Afghanistan had made thousands of children destitute. The repeatedly reference to orphanage in the novel also asserts the preoccupation of the novelist with the parent-child relation.

On close analysis one can see that most of the mothers in the novel have a loving bond with their children. The conflict which is visible in major father-child relation is absent in the mother-child relation. There are two absent mothers and one of them even returns after twenty years. Even they have their share of warmth and love with their children. To conclude one can say that in the novel the children have a very healthy and loving relation with one of the parents, but there is a conflict with the other parent. Though the conflict is lessened in the end of the novel and they have better understanding. Amir and Soraya do not have much cordiality with their father and Hassan though only for a period of time has anger for his mother, but they have warmth and cordiality with their other parent respectively. Sohrab is the only exception who has love for both his mother and father. Thus as Timothy Aubry says in his book *Reading As Therapy* “*The Kite Runner* offers a revealing look at a completely unfamiliar culture and that it nevertheless tells an essentially human story, to which any reader can relate” (187), holds good even to the novel’s brilliant analysis of parent-child relation which is universal and finds an echo in every heart.

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